

AN EXPLORATION OF EMBODIED NARRATIVE IN CERAMIC VESSELS

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1) Research investigation:

To what extent can ceramic vessels generate a personal expressive language and
function as a container of embodied narrative?

2) Copyright statement

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3) Abstract

In this exegesis it is argued that the development of ideas explicated through selected works from my artistic practice, and supported by the contextualisation offered by my two books, constitutes a new contribution to the field. This commentary charts the development of a language of making, developed through the process and writing about raku and high-fired ceramics; it then evolved through installation practice and appropriation to frame a new personal expressive direction to the work. The main methodological approach is an analysis through the practice itself as a tool of research. This fits the paradigm of Practice as Research (PaR) as an analytical tool that can provide revelatory insights into artistic output; the revelations derived from this analysis are read through the lens of phenomenology. This philosophical perspective is developed, through the critical tool of PaR, into a metaphoric concern, where the clay body of a ceramic vessel can also be read as a human body. The argument is developed through a critique of the narratives embodied in the work that have become evident to me through the interwoven activities of making and reflective writing. To this end, a trajectory is charted through significant submissions; this narrative commences by examining individual vessels, via an analysis of related pieces in exhibitions to an emergent installation-practice that reveals new insights and a new reading of the work as by a second-generation Holocaust survivor.

The revisions in this document represent a completely new re-writing of the chapters concerning the methodology, context and contribution to knowledge.

4) Dedication:

In memory of my grandparents, Aron and Taube Stimler, whom I have started to understand more deeply through this praxis.

5) Acknowledgements

This PhD acknowledges the support and assistance of my supervisors: Professor Steven Dixon, Professor Jim Aulich, Michael Eden, my colleagues at Wolverhampton University and my family and friends, who have all accompanied me on this long journey.

6) Author's Declaration

1. During the period of registered study in which the thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification.
2. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

David Jones

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9) List of The Submitted Works

- **S1) *Raku – Investigations into Fire: Book***, first published by Crowood Press, 1999; new edition 2007; ISBN: 978-1-86126-139-7 [Henceforth referred to as: *Raku*]
- **S2) *Deconstructed Tea Bowls, Deconstructed Teaset: Artefacts created for the Exhibition: Raku-Harmony of Earth, Water and Fire***. International Raku Symposium and Exhibition (co-curated) at Biseul Arts Centre, Daegu, Korea, 2001.
- **S3) *Vessels about containment: Artefacts created for the Exhibition: Raku – Origins, Impact and Contemporary Expression***. International Raku Symposium, Eagleheart center for Art and Inquiry, Grand Junction, Colorado, USA; and Exhibition Tour (co-curated), USA, 2005 – 2007.
- **S4) *fixing light – fixing fire: Installation Exhibit***: Originated for the Pump Rooms Gallery, Leamington Spa and UK Tour, 2002-2004. Funded by ACE, UK. (Collaboration with Rod Dorling, photographer, and John Bell, exhibition designer).
- **S5) *Durch das Feuer Gehen: Installation Exhibit***: Commissioned by Keramikmuseum Westerwald, Germany, 2006. (with exhibition designer John Bell).
- **S6) *Firing – Philosophies within Contemporary Ceramic Practice: Book***, published by Crowood Press, 2007, ISBN: 9-78186-1-269355 [Henceforth referred to as: *Firing*]
- **S7) *Affairs of the Heart: Installation Exhibit***: Created at the symposium: *Wofur brennen Wir*, Kunstlerhaus 188, Halle, Germany, 2006.

- **S8) *The Warriors of 5-12: Permanent Museum Installation*:** created for the FuLe International Ceramic Art Museum, Fuping, Shaanxi, China. 2008.
 - **S9) *A Body of Contention: Installation Exhibit*:** Created for the 10th. Anniversary exhibition of anagama-fired ceramics”, Tallinn, Estonia. 2010.
 - **S10) *Grenzerfahrung: Installation Exhibit*:** created in the symposium *Panta Rhei* (“All is change” or “Everything Flows” [Heraclitus]), Römhild, Germany, 2011; + tour: 2012,13.
-

9.1) Illustrations of Submissions

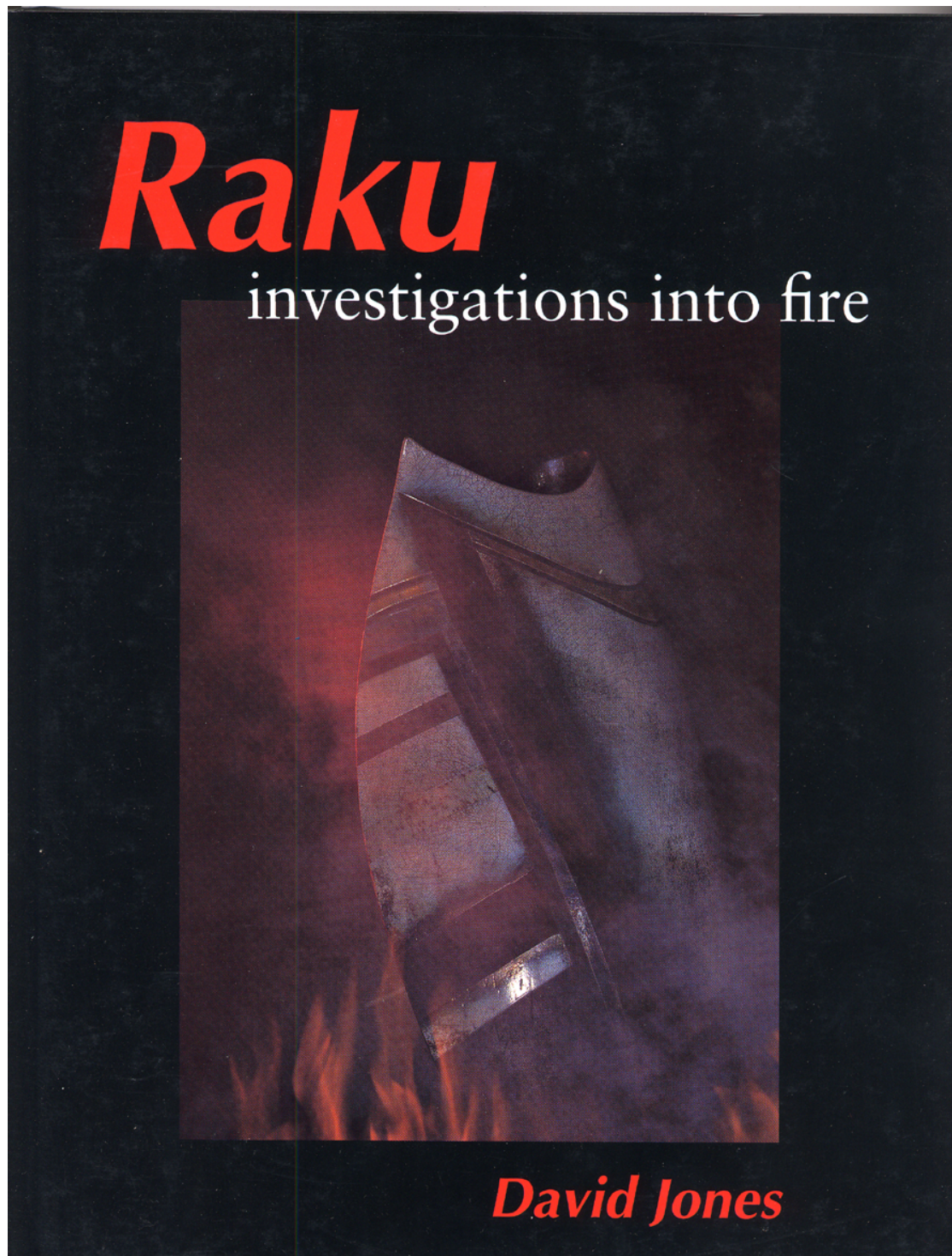


Fig. 1: Submission S1) *Raku – Investigations into Fire*, (Book).



Fig. 2: Submission S2) *Deconstructed Teaset* (raku-fired vessels).



Fig. 3: Submission S3) *Vessels about containment, Dark Pool. Canyon Reflections series*, (raku-fired vessel).



Fig. 4: Submission S4) *fixing light – fixing fire*, (Installation view).

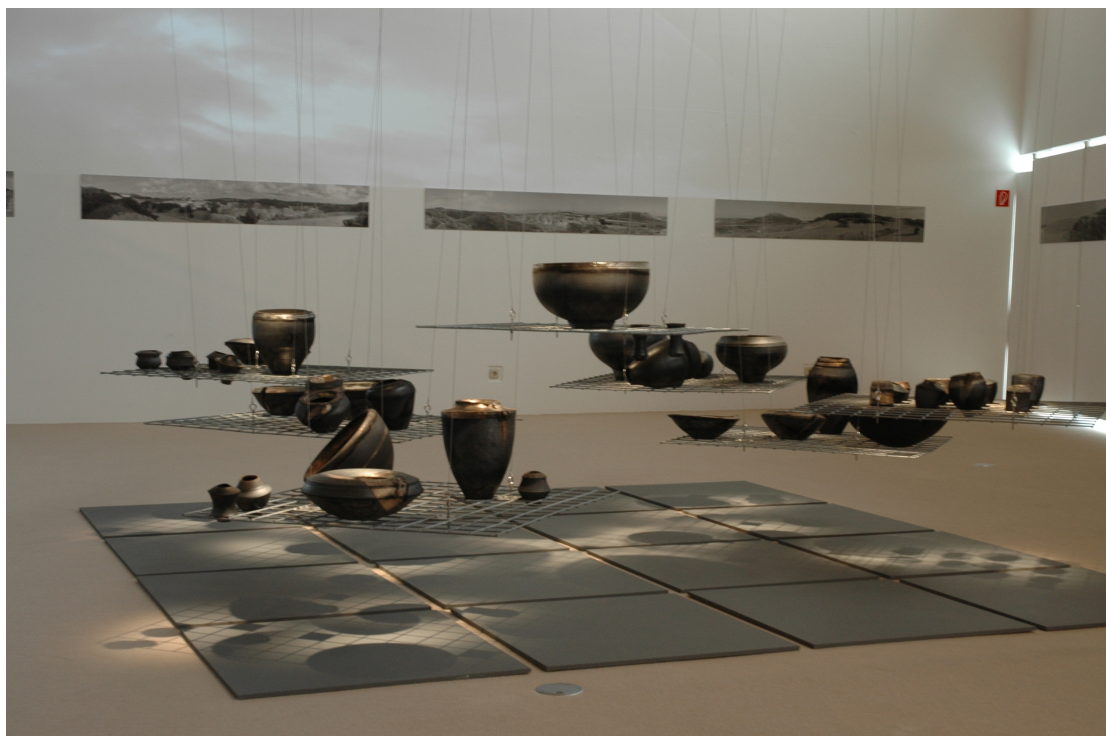


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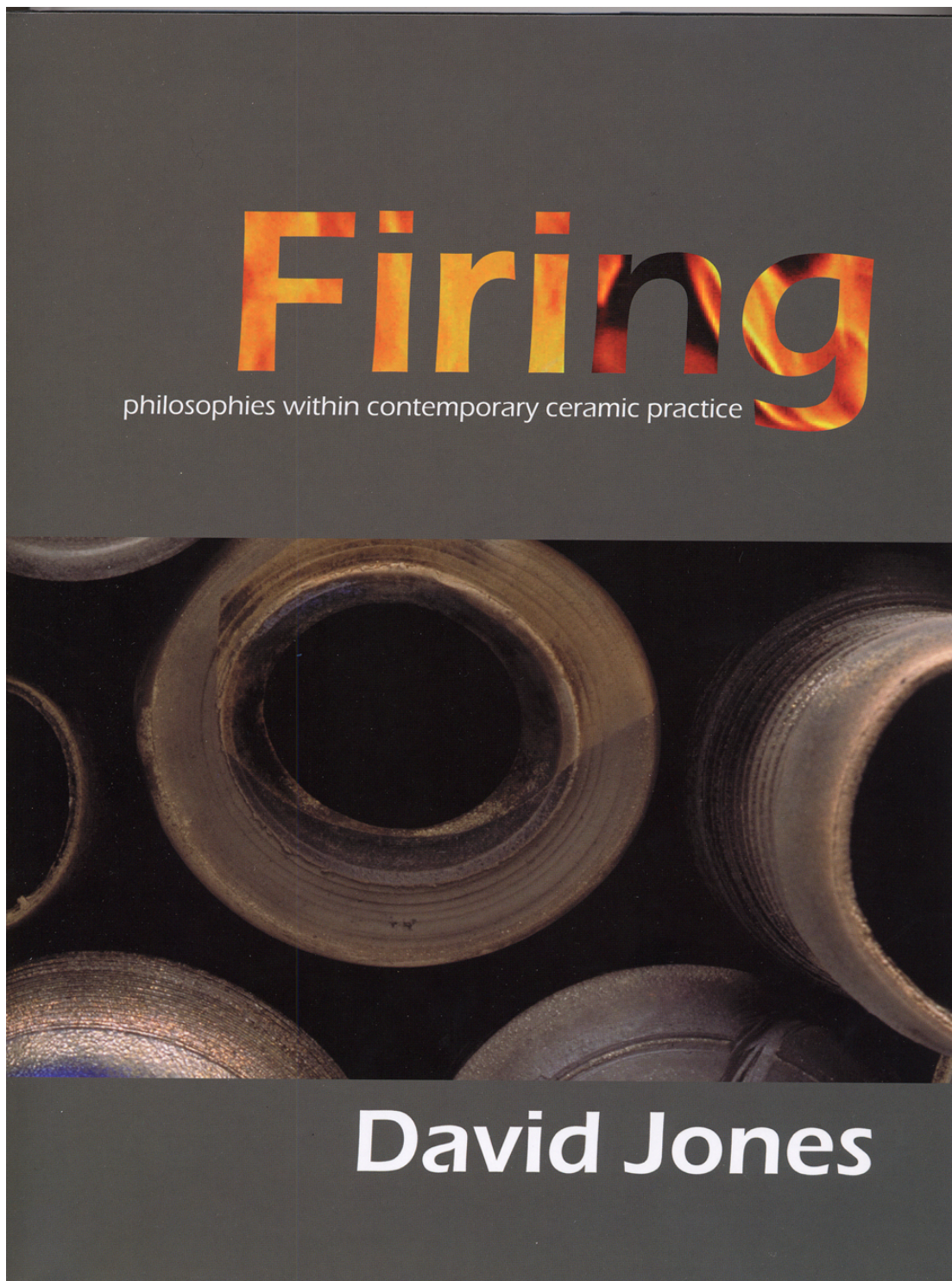


Fig. 6: Submission S6) Firing – Philosophies within Contemporary Ceramic Practice (Book).



Fig. 7: Submission S7) *Affairs of the Heart* (Installation view).



Fig. 8: Submission S8) *The Warriors of 5-12*, (Installation view).



Fig. 9 Submission S9) *A Body of Contention*, (Installation view).



Fig. 10: Submission S10) *Grenzerfahrung*, (Installation view).

10.1) Introduction

This PhD by publication interrogates the making, exhibiting and theoretical reflection that has developed through my practice, by critiquing a selection of significant objects and installations drawn from my work (Submissions S2-S5, S7-10). This has predominantly been expressed through the medium of ceramics, where the methods and qualities of raku-making and firing in particular have emerged to generate a new language of fired surface and process. The trajectory culminates in an analysis of the way this language has been employed to express the loss of my grandparents in the Holocaust. This ceramic work has developed concurrently with writing; chief amongst my outputs are two books that provide a theoretical, technical and contextual framework for the understanding of the making, firing and exhibiting (Submissions S1, S6).

This inquiry is framed within an understanding of Practice as Research (PaR) that has evolved from the writings of Tom Barone and Eliot Eisner (2012); Estelle Barrett (2010); Barbara Bolt (2010); Paul Carter (2004); Norman Denzin, and Yvonna Lincoln, (eds.) (2013); Robin Nelson (2013); Kristina Niederrerr (2007); Richard Shusterman (2013); and Graham Sullivan (2010).

I shall consider the methodology of PaR under the following headings:

- PaR as the phenomenological understanding of an embodied maker
- PaR as a means of generating a language of ceramics through embodied narratives of materiality.
- PaR as a means to connect embodied narrative and audience.
- PaR as emergent and reflective.
- PaR as generating haptic and tacit knowledge.
- PaR as a means to extrapolate from individual experience, and make a contribution to new knowledge.

PaR is an activity through which it is possible to interrogate the meaning embedded in the work, that exists both by designed intention but that is also manifested unconsciously. Estelle Barrett argues that: “creative arts research is often motivated by emotional, personal and subjective concerns, it operates not only on the basis of explicit and exact knowledge, but also on that of tacit knowledge.” (Barrett, 2010, p143). This is tacit knowledge as understood by Michael Polanyi who, from the context of the natural sciences observed that “we can know more than we can tell.” [Polanyi, 2009, p4]. My work is a praxis, as understood by Robin Nelson (Nelson, 2013, p5), in that there is a reciprocal relation between the theory and the making and the one informs the other.

The methodology of PaR provides a means by which that narrative embodied by the practice can be communicated to audiences. As Graeme Sullivan explains: “knowledge that is embodied in practice, argued in a thesis, and constructed as a discourse within the institutional setting, all contribute to new understanding.” (Sullivan, 2010, p83). The theoretical aspect of the work is not solely this exegesis but has also been provided by my writing two books concurrently with the making; these books were a critical contextualizing of international ceramics as well as analyses of the methods and rationales of production. In this way my work fits into the paradigm suggested by Sullivan, who draws fine distinctions between the three main methods of inquiry: “in quantitative studies [the research method] is linear, iterative and confirmatory, and which in qualitative inquiries is cyclical, emergent and discovery oriented. Visual arts research, on the other hand, is dynamic, reflexive and revelatory, as creative and critical practices are used to shed new light on what is known and to consider the possibility of what is not.” (Sullivan, 2010, p191-2)

By situating the work within contexts framed by the work of contemporary potters and artists, themselves understood through the lens of PaR, the praxis has

enabled new understandings to emerge, not merely in relation to raku practice and its inherent specialised language of form, mark-making and firing, but also in the ways in which a language developed through installation-practice can reveal previously repressed understanding and feelings, establishing a contribution to new knowledge.

11) Methodology: Practice as Research

11.1) PaR as the phenomenological understanding of an embodied maker.

The concept of PaR proposes a consideration of the world as monistic, implying that there is no separation of body and mind; fundamentally this work considers “the body as a site of active perception and subjectivity” (Shusterman, 2012, p5). PaR therefore opposes the dualism imposed by other schemas; it avoids the detachment of positivist, unitary truth-seeking; it is a methodology that considers the body as of equal importance to the mind in creativity through an embodied practice. The exegesis commences from the philosophical perspective of the phenomenologist: the maker is situated, embodied in the world. We are our bodies – this means that we can only understand the world through our bodies, and reciprocally understand our body through our perceptions of the world; as Maurice Merleau-Ponty expressed it: “My body model of the things and the things model of my body.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, Footnote p131). Juhani Pallasmaa elaborates this fundamental idea: “My body ...[is] the very locus of reference, memory, imagination and integration.” (Pallasmaa, 2009, p32). Shusterman further explains that mind, as well as body, are ‘background’ that is they provide a framework that structures our being, and of which we can be both aware and unaware” (Shusterman, 2012, p66). Merleau-Ponty reads the body as “the fabric into which all objects are woven, and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of my comprehension.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1970, p235). In my work the body is read both as an object but also as an aspect of personal identity, in addition to being a clay-body (which is the terminology for a mix of clays); my outer body is conjoined with my inner self in the work. This is the journey charted here that critically investigates the transition from maker of raku-fired sculptural ceramic vessels (submissions S2, S3), to a new comprehension that the work could be read as standing symbolically for my

own body (submissions S7, S8) and by extension for the bodies of my ancestors and others (submissions S9, S10). In this exegesis, the body is read as the repository of memory as well as action, the act of making allowed access to repressed memory and allowed new readings of the work to emerge. In this expanded practice other firing strategies than raku were experimented with, as a means of expression. The work does not solely rely on the visual for its comprehension – the communication made by the work relates as much to the hand and tactile sensation as it does to the gaze (the skin is, in fact, our largest sense organ).

This reading of the body compels me to think of narrative as embodied. Daniel C. Dennett originally proposed “embodied narrative” as a concept that might explicate the self (Dennett, 1992, p427). Arthur Danto developed the idea that he called “embodied meaning” to apply to productions in art (Danto, 1964, p580); Bruce Metcalf further refined this theory in the context of the crafts, as “embodied sympathy”; he proposes the idea of “sympathetic craft as an extension of its maker’s [hand]. The pot in being touched, extends the potter’s touch to its user...for this process to work, the object must be used” (Metcalf, 2002, p7). In this exegesis the embodied narrative connotes the metaphoric and symbolic content of a work, signified via its material, haptic and its visual properties. Through these embedded narratives the thoughts and feelings of the artist are communicable, indeed directly intuitable, to the audience, not merely through words and actions, but also via handling the objects he or she has made, or appropriated. This is a model of interpretation that is significant in contemporary exegesis: Borgdorff explicates:

“Art research begins by addressing questions that are pertinent in the research context and in the art world. Researchers employ experimental and hermeneutic methods that reveal and articulate the tacit knowledge that is

situated and embodied in specific artworks and artistic processes.” (quoted in Sullivan, 2010, p79)

Merleau-Ponty draws our attention to the fact that, uniquely in humans, there is a “reciprocal insertion and intertwining” of the “seeing body with the visible body” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p138) In my ceramics I have developed this observation to make objects that, while they originate in hapticity, can also communicate the uniqueness of, what Marx calls, our “species being” to an audience on the visual plane.

11.2) PaR as a means of generating a language of ceramics through embodied narratives of materiality.

Daniel Miller asks a fundamental question: “How can one ask questions of things that cannot speak for themselves?” (Miller, 2008, p2). He argues that objects are not inert with no power to communicate, instead he suggests they can be penetrated using the correct tools and attitudes; we can understand this in the light of Roland Barthes’ pronouncement that the “death of the author is the birth of the reader”. (ibid, p48). Thus a study of materiality can provide insight into how the meaning of an object can be “unravelling” (Pearce, 1998, p1); this is what Vicky Coltman, an historian, and Paul Carter, an artist and author, refer to as “material thinking” (in Gerritson, 2015, p22), (Carter, 2004, pxi). The choice of the material (clay) brings historical and traditional narratives embodied in the fabricated pieces. As Anne Gerritson informs the reader in her recent study of history, this “[m]eaning...emerges from the relationship between objects and people” (Gerritson, 2015, p2). The vessel tradition is particularly suited to generating associations concerned with containment and through its associations with conviviality to recall

memories of human interactions. The emergent theme of the submissions was remembrance through the medium of objects; thus in this context it is significant for me that no possessions from my grandparent's generation passed to me – a poignant reinforcing of Daniel Miller's observation that: "people sediment possessions, lay them down as foundation, material walls mortared with memory." (Miller, 2008, p90). A language of ceramics allows for a complementary communication, since: "Things are different from words, they rarely form narrative sequences, one followed by another, as words do. Instead they present themselves simultaneously, so that each may allude to its relation to several other objects and images if one can learn to read the whole" (ibid, 2008, p109). This is the endeavour of the installations examined here, where these multiple perspectives are possible through simultaneous presentation and apperception of the work.

It is relevant for this exegesis that "memories are conveyed through the objects that fill [our lives]. Objects have meanings for the people who produce, and own, purchase and gift, use and consume them" (Gerritson, 2015, p2). Heidegger, writing as a phenomenologist, observes that: "all works have this thingly character" (Heidegger, 1993, p145). This is also the Zen/raku notion of the *here and nowness* of an object. For the potter, there is no more thingly stuff than clay. In his phenomenological exploration of the jug, Heidegger refers the reader to the idea of a vessel's quality of containment: "The emptiness, the void, is what does the vessel's holding...[the potter] shapes the void. For it, in it, and out of it, he forms the clay into the form" (Heidegger, 1971, p169).

This metaphor of the forming of a clay vessel as an analogy for a human life, the way in which the clay material can be broken and yet the shards survive for long historical duration is a central concept underpinning the work. As Gerritson observes: "Objects are the "tools through which people shape their lives" (Gerritson, 2015, p3).

In my installations, the objects that I have made give shape to the intentions concerning family and loss; they are an emptiness. Hand-made ceramic objects also embody a narrative of time – in their making and in their resonance as objects in use and in museum exhibitions. Sennett remarks that: “The ancient potter dwelled in stretched-out time.” (Sennett, 2008, p123). This concept of duration and the materiality of objects was particularly significant in the installation *Grenzerfahrung (S10)* in which a physical remembrance of my grandparents and anonymous others was created (see pages 69-78). It drew on the fact that ceramic objects persist and are the main memorial objects found in early burials; this utilisation of ceramics as a main ingredient in the work was confirmed by Hannah Arendt’s observation that “We are surrounded by things more permanent than the activity by which they were produced, and potentially more permanent than the lives of their authors” (Arendt, 1998, p172).

11.3) PaR as a means to connect embodied narrative and audience.

Liora Bresler argues that narrative is linked to performance and crucially to a “connection between the narrator and his/her story; and connection between the audience”. (Bresler, 2014). A link is established between the artist and the audiences who experience the work in exhibition, albeit in a symbolic way; this occurs through both the handling of objects as well as their visual perception. (*Raku*, pp82-83; 100-102). The meaningfulness of narrative in the light of these observations is based partly on its fictive, storied nature. Interestingly, an etymology of the word fiction, has embedded in it a reference to the craft of the potter, which long antedates its use to describe literature: “*fiction* (n.): (late 14C) something invented; *fictio*: a fashioning or feigning, noun of action from past participle stem of *fingere*: to shape, form, devise, feign, originally: to knead, form out of clay, from Proto-Indo-European root *dheigh* to

build, form, knead. As a branch of literature, 1590s.” (Online Etymological Dictionary). In this light, the primary goal of the research critiqued here is not essentially concerned with veracity, but with the meanings, or the imaginative fictions that we make, which will be as one truth among many.

Thus the work is viewed like “A work of creative non-fiction [which] may therefore be read simultaneously both literally and metaphorically” (Barone and Eisner, 2012, p110). The ceramic vessel will be considered from the point of view of an object created within the parameters of technique and tradition, and then in a new ontology the vessel is simultaneously read as a pot, as well as standing for human beings (*Grenzerfahrung*, S10).

The first work discussed in this exegesis comprises vessels, both thrown on a potter's wheel and altered; they were created within a raku idiom that had been explored in my first book *Raku* (S1). These modes of making and critical writing developed through personal research in Japan in response to the writings of, amongst others, Ian Byers (1990), Paul Soldner (2015), John Houston (1991), Tim Andrews (1994), Richard Hirsch (1975). For these authors the link to Japan and to Zen Buddhism was not so significant a part of their narratives; most significant for them was the idea of raku as the contemporary mode of fast-firing invented in America. In *Raku* I therefore highlighted the relative importance of the Japanese heritage for my own work, and the underpinning Zen-Buddhist philosophy and aesthetic of traditional Japanese raku within a contemporary context, while still situating my practice within a Modernist idiom. From the answers provided by the makers whom I had interviewed for *Raku*, this Zen aspect was not so significant for many potters and artists either. Thus the reflective practice of writing *Raku* demonstrated how fired ceramic might be employed to convey a message, and subsequently this observation led to an investigation into the possibility of utilizing the

conventions of installation art to question my raku method in a three-dimensional setting that considered the photographic representation and evocation of process as a further investigation of the nature and meaning of raku. (*fixing light- fixing fire, S4*).

This involved positioning the practice as research, which implies that, for instance, the throwing of a pot and its firing, as well as its interpretation, can be considered as a significant element of the framing of the research investigation, which was to examine the potential of ceramic vessels to generate a personal expressive language and to function as a container of embodied narrative.

These are insights that arose as I was engaged in making and writing, thus it is now important to examine the nature of PaR as it manifests itself as an emergent practice.

11.4) PaR as emergent and reflective.

As an interpretive and qualitative methodology, PaR is a search for meanings through practice; it sees its insights and understandings as emergent and never fixed, open to variable interpretations. This claim for emergence also differentiates PaR from other modes of inquiry. As Estelle Barrett explains, in her introduction to *Practice as Research*: "A feature of studio-based enquiry is that the method unfolds through practice - practice is itself productive of knowledge and engenders further practice demonstrating the emergent nature of the process." (Barrett, 2010, p9). The emergent dimension of PaR characterised my research trajectory and its phenomenological dimension; it begins in a studio research environment that focuses on raku making and material technologies and culminates in an inquiry into the expressive use of the iconography and meanings of clay and raku firing in installation. My research journey leads from an analysis of studio-based practices to collaborative installations created with other artists and audiences. In these

installations the vessel was read as an object transformed in the fire which created a resonance with the transformation of the body in the Holocaust, a focus of the later submissions. This was a trajectory that commenced with *Durch das Feuer gehen* (S5) towards reading the vessel symbolically as a possible way of engaging with the fate of my family in Germany, while it simultaneously presented the opportunity to engage with the conventions of siting the work in a museum context.

The understanding of the emergent nature of PaR, relevant to this exegesis, derives from the principle that all knowledge derives from our condition of “thrownness” or being-in-the-world, (Heidegger, 1973, p188). Richard Shusterman wishes to insist that “even our most basic nondiscursive experiences are significantly shaped by the cultures and environments we inhabit...[even] in the womb” (Shusterman, 2012, p195). We are born into culture, and as human beings we come to an understanding of the world through interaction with it. Heidegger describes this relationship to the world as its being ready-to-hand: that is, I know the world theoretically only after I have come to understand it through handling and use (Heidegger, 1973, p98). Clearly such knowledge-generation cannot come from hypothesis-led inquiry (which decides on the course of inquiry at the beginning of the research), since art is a mode of “revelation” (Bolt [in Barrett, 2010, p34]; Nelson, 2013, p19). This present exegesis recognizes that knowledge generation, through art practice as research, derives from the revelation that there is an interpenetration of making and theory, the one inscribed on the other in a process of making and reflecting, and then making again in response to that analysis. Robin Nelson denotes PaR as “praxis” (Nelson, 2013, p29); he defines PaR as: “theory imbricated within practice.” (ibid, p33), utilising a visual image to emphasise the overlapping and interdependent nature of the two fields. Barrett describes this as a “dialogic relationship between the exegesis...and studio practice.” (Barrett, 2010, foreword)

This is manifest in my own work, which has alternated practice with contextualising through reflective writing – in particular the books *Raku* and *Firing*, each of which placed my work in a critical relationship with the work of international makers. *Raku* critiqued the origin of my practice in the manufacture of vessels related to culturally determined domestic icons, drawn from ceramic tradition; *Firing* (S6) appraised a resolution of the practical investigations in a series of installations (S4, S5), where these vessels were sited to communicate a meaning that had only emerged through reflection. This is a process described in *The Reflective Practitioner* by Donald Schön (1983), who posits a series of feedback loops that require critical evaluation of past actions that inform and cause modification in future action.

At the root of my understanding of making lies the most basic axiom, that ceramics is matter transformed; clay commences as rock and through geological change becomes a plastic material that can be fashioned by hand and when clay objects are exposed to heat they change permanently. This is a significant metaphor for the transformation documented here in my practice, which references both the materiality of ceramics as well as the historical traditions of making and firing, whilst also being able to be read as contemporary artefacts, imbued with significance (Cooper, 2000; Houston, 1991; de Waal, 2003). Through exhibition, and as elements in art installation, my ceramic pieces entered the world of culture, where they were then open to other critiques derived from these domains. For instance, in the series of essays commissioned for the critical transitional exhibition *Durch das Feuer Gehen* (S5) in Germany, the commentators enlarged on the discussions they had had with me and mediated the implied intentions incipient in the work to the audience. Thus Professor Catherine Bates placed the work in relation to the dichotomy present in readings of the vessel, which lies between the homeliness of use and ritual and the sinister aspects (Freud's *Unheimliche*) that are manifested

within a metaphoric reading of the same pieces as symbolic of the Holocaust (Bates in Hughes, 2006, p9)

In this way the knowledge embedded could be shared, through audiences experiencing the work. The writing also served to generate new practice: the research and writing of *Raku* (S1) in 1999 had led directly to invitations to create exhibitions and installations that critically examined the nature and the rationales of raku itself. The revised edition of *Raku* was published simultaneously with *Firing* (S6) in 2007. This later book explored the rationales employed by other practitioners and expanded my own vocabulary of firing – from a focus on raku to examine the ways in which the nature of fire and change (the signifiers generated in the making) could suggest new questions of the "ways in which subjectivity could be constituted corporeally" (Shaun McLeod in Barrett, 2010, p86), in my own work. This led me to examine how the processual marks embedded in my ceramics could be communicated and thence to the realizing of my work as installations, which allowed me to inquire about a new range of issues – starting with the nature of raku and culminating in analysing how the burnt clay surfaces might represent my relatives in the Holocaust. I employed the idea of the handmade to convey essential human qualities through the embedded marks of the hand. Thus, by the end of the research the objects are ambiguous; they are still about themselves and the indexical marks of making fired into them, but they are also hybrid objects that stand for more than themselves. The grammar of materiality had also been extended. I came to read the heat, smoke and flame of ceramic firing, resulting in the charring/blackening of the clay body, as a signifier in the work for the charring of the human body in the crematoria and thus as representative of the Holocaust. This realization was a discovery that led me to re-contextualise my practice originating in raku-fired ceramic vessels (S1, S2, S3, S4); it led to a new understanding of the embodied meaning of

my work through submissions S5, S6, S7, S8, S9 and S10 as a 2nd generation Holocaust survivor, as understood by Eva Hoffmann. (Hoffmann 2004)

At the same time the employment of unfired clay, and the presence of the embedded hand in thrown vessels also became part of the vocabulary embodied in the work (S10). These reflections lead me to consider hand-madeness – the next significant quality of PaR.

11.5) PaR as generating haptic and tacit knowledge.

Reflecting on the making of Submissions S5 and S7 I realised that the gashing, by hand- and tool-marking, of the raw clay vessels and the fire-marking of the ceramic surfaces, which in Submissions S2, S3 and S4 had been directed mainly for aesthetic effect, but undertaken partially unselfconsciously, were highly significant to me in terms of their meanings. The installations revealed my relationship to the Holocaust, which had been repressed, and the last groups of installations (S7, S8, S9, S10) provided an opportunity to bring this suppressed knowledge to consciousness. The formal interrogation in this study gave me time to reflect on personal identity, and brought me to the awareness that my work could be read as authored by a second-generation Holocaust survivor.

One of the central ways in which this knowledge is communicated is via the hand, which is an integral part of my expression in ceramics. For Martin Heidegger the concept of handlability is a central aspect of our essential relationship to the world. We are thrown into the world – it precedes us in every way, and the way that we come to know it is through its proximity, its readiness-to-hand. (Heidegger, 1962, p98) This relates to the essential, haptic, qualities that I experience as a maker of ceramics, as well as to the essential material qualities of the medium. Through haptic experience PaR, as a research strategy, can provide other knowledge, some of

which is not translatable into spoken and written language, since as Polanyi has observed, “we know more than we can tell” (Polanyi, 2009, p4). Barrett has developed this position: “Because creative arts research is often motivated by emotional, personal and subjective concerns, it operates not only on the basis of explicit and exact knowledge, but also on that of tacit knowledge.” (Barrett, 2010, p143).

This knowledge proved revelatory to me, in my capacity as a critical analyst of the outcomes, in that the new knowledge revealed concerned not merely the interpretation of the objects, but also of the maker. The making of pots became a way of asking questions about myself, and my heritage, using a ceramic language, that had been previously closed to me. This does not mean that such knowledge evaded textual communication and interrogation, but it stood as an alternative to it, and allowed me to access it consciously. This understanding of making informed some of the wider ramifications of the research, and introduced the issue of how highly individual and particular knowledge can have a wider application.

11.6) PaR as a means to extrapolate from individual experience, and make a contribution to new knowledge.

The presence of a highly personal narrative invites questions about the trustworthiness and generalisability of evidence. In terms of generalisation, Barratt argues that art can be both highly personal and particular, in addition to being general at the same time. She explains that PaR is significant “in the production of knowledge and as a mode of knowledge production...it generates personally situated worlds, knowledge and new ways of modelling and externalising such knowledge while at the same time revealing philosophical, social and cultural contexts” (Barrett, 2010, p2). The notion of PaR as revelatory is explained by Denzin and Lincoln who

expose qualitative research as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world ...a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible.” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013, p6). These interpretative practices are not necessarily known in advance - this is particularly the case with PaR, since the understandings unfold as the work brings new knowledge and awareness into the light, as a kind of montage (ibid, p8). This ‘unfolding’ is a form of thinking that occurs with the production of things; in addition, placement within site may change the thinking. For example, sometimes my vessels are simply pots, but sometimes they stand for something else entirely, such as the human body (Submissions S7, S8). The structures of the installations also suggested multiple meanings – thus the racking system in *Grenzerfahrung* (S10) is a series of shelves and serves to support materials, but it is also to be read as the bunks of the concentration camps, and an arbitrary line dividing space, and representing borders, the historic East-West German wall. The shelves carry both general, historical as well as autobiographical referents with them. In this way the work functions as more than the sum of its parts. As an installation it is an immersive experience insofar as the audience experiences the room divided, or lined, by shelves; the shelves carry both their normal connotation as well as a suggestion of spaces divided off where the path is blocked.

Paul Carter refers to the ways in which artefacts prompt us to extend our understandings as “material thinking” (Carter, 2004, pxi), by which he means that when experience is filtered, by being transformed into art, that it moves from the individual expression to a universal condition. Of relevance here is Stake’s notion of ‘naturalistic generalisation’ (Stake, 1995, pxiii), which rests on the view that exploring a single case invites an audience to fit and compare it with other cases. For instance Boltanski’s (2010) installation ‘*Personnes*’ (see page 74) speaks of one case of genocide but invites thought about others such as the genocides in Rwanda or the

states of the former Yugoslavia. Thus a case is both singular and general, depending on audience response, through the echoes it creates with other experiences. My own trajectory emphasises “the dialogical relation between elements yielding resonances” (Nelson, 2013, p7).

12. Context:

Emergent considerations in the Practice as Research.

12.1) Introduction

I now move on to discussing the submissions, the PaR, through the contexts of their entry into the public domain.

The work is firstly to be understood through the context provided by the practical, intellectual and ritualistic traditions of ceramics, mediated by contemporary debates relating to the display of objects in gallery spaces and in installations. Some of the significant environments that have enabled my work to develop, through a critical consideration of my outputs, were the contacts with international clay artists at conferences and symposia; these inquiries were extended in the discussions with the makers when I wrote the books (S1, S6). These opportunities to present my ceramics in juxtaposition with the work of other artists prompted an experimentation with groupings of pieces: an installation practice emerged that originated in a response to the concepts underpinning raku and developed into installations that not merely used a variety of fired and unfired ceramics, but also included appropriated waste objects from industrial sites.

The work has consistently utilised the pot thrown on the potter's wheel and subsequently altered as an element in the work; I use the term vessel to denote such an object whose ontology, or nature, originates in function and becomes an aesthetic

object that retains the association with use but now has an ascribed function as a ritual object (Houston, 1991, p6; de Waal, 2003, p186). Thus the vessel is a carrier of meaning by referencing utility. It embodies ideas of the handmade and I understand these through the philosophical accounts provided by phenomenology, in particular that of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The vessel further signifies narratives embodied by the work through the qualities generated by firing in a kiln; these register themselves on the surface of the clay through the impact of flame on clay and glaze.

12.2) Narratives of Raku and the Vessel.

12.2.1) Raku.

The starting point for the research was provided by the writing and publication of *Raku* (S1) in 1999, and this book also provided subsequent impetus to the practice; (*Raku* was substantially revised and re-published in 2007). The first practical submissions (S2, S3) related to two significant movements in ceramics; these are bodies of work made as a response to the utensils of the Japanese tradition of tea drinking, and also the English equivalent, which were fired using a variant of the American raku process, a genre that I had further developed (*Raku*, pp42, 82-3). They were thrown on the potter's wheel, as groups of non-functional vessels and decorated with a range of decorative glazes, whose purpose was aesthetic not utilitarian. Through this practice a personal ceramic language was developed, that was an outcome of the cycles of making and reflection; it was a conceptualization that derived from direct action on the clay and the examination of the fired results, that through reflection created meaning.

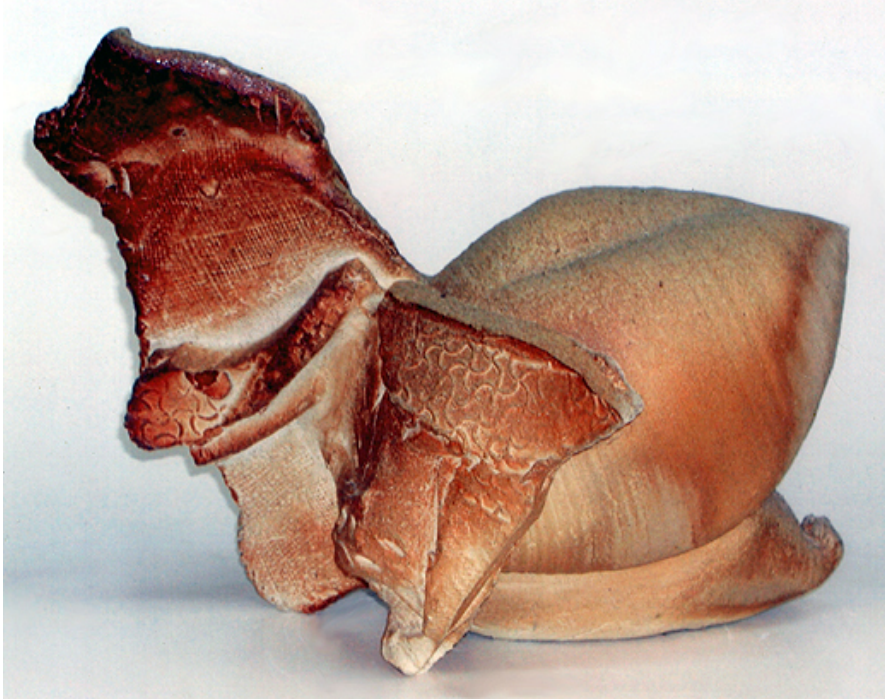


Fig. 11: Paul Soldner, *Ceramic Sculpture, Thrown and Altered*, (Raku-Fired), 1982.



Fig. 12: Richard Hirsch, *Ceremonial Cup, Tripod Form* (Raku-Fired Terra Sigillatas), 1989.



Fig. 13: Rick Forris, *Lustre Raku Vessel*, 1995

My own practical understanding of raku had commenced in the 1970s. The raku method of making with which I experimented was exemplified by C20th clay artists, such as Paul Soldner (*Raku*, p142), Richard Hirsch (*Raku*, p98-100) and Rick Forris (*Raku*, p111); this was essentially a 1960s American re-invention of the Japanese technique related to the free-improvisational styles of jazz and the contemporary art movement of Abstract Expressionism. It represented an alternative way of making and firing that incorporated the bright colour palette of earthenware ceramics, rather than the high temperature, more subdued glaze effects sought by the expressive clay artists like Peter Voulkos, Don Reitz and Jim Leedy.



Fig. 14: Don Reitz, *Teabowl*, 2005



Fig. 15: Jim Leedy, *Lakeside Plate*, 1990

The work retained from the Japanese process the active intervention of the potter in the removal of the red-hot pot from the fire; most importantly for my future work it permitted a free way of marking both the clay and the still liquid glaze surface that with practice could be partially controlled. This was an interactive process that found a resonance with many of the raku potters I had studied for *Raku* (David Roberts, in my interview for *Raku*, defined his understanding of raku as taking the piece out of the kiln and doing something to it while still hot and reactive); this resonated with the intentions explicit in *fixing light-fixing fire* (S4) where the installation offered a mediated experience of the performative actions of raku firing through the juxtaposition of large photographic images and also a sound-track of firing to accompany the vessels.



Fig. 16: *fixing light - fixing fire (S4)*, Installation in Pump Rooms Gallery.

At the beginning of my research trajectory, my context was established by the processes involved in raku. In addition to the aged looking surfaces of crackle glazes, I had experimented with various lustre-glaze surfaces, which developed into an interplay with unglazed effect. To further emphasise this contrast I developed a terra-sigillata (deflocculated) clay slip, which allowed the body of the clay vessel to re-possess the freshness of newly made clay (*Raku*, pp82-3, 100-2). One of the significant adaptations I made was my development of a glaze containing silver and gold salts that had been prompted by research into Islamic and Hispano-Moresque traditions of lustre and experimenting with their materials in a direct mode of reduction, afforded by plunging the pot into dense sawdust (*Raku*, p34, 41-2). The subsequent research for *Raku* enabled me to critically position my work against both historic exemplars and the contemporary work of fifty-five practitioners in raku; as a result of uncovering the meanings attributed by other makers to their work I further interpreted my own ceramic outputs in a critical fashion.

For the conclusion to *Raku* I wrote a riposte to the celebrated first chapter of *A Potter's Book* (Leach, 1977, p1-27), that I referentially entitled "Away from a

Standard" (*Raku*, p154-6); this enabled me to critically position myself away from the aesthetic of high-fired stoneware prevalent at that time. In the field of ceramics there were already a number of texts discussing raku, including those by Richard Hirsch (1975), Tim Andrews (1994), Ian Byers (1990), Steve Branffman (1991), Robert Pipenberg (1972). My own investigation in *Raku* was not as strictly descriptive, but inquired critically how technique and process derived from the maker's own interpretation of raku and low-fired ceramics could reveal meaning. Raku was analysed through a number of lenses, commencing with a technical, material examination of the practice, these lenses were – 'The Allusive', 'Metaphoric', 'Representational' and 'Processual'. This research made me focus on the ways in which making and firing in themselves can be employed to embed meaning in ceramic work, a theme that pervades this exegesis.

Raku (1999) also permitted an examination of my own work, the sources most relevant to which were derived primarily from a study of the practices and utensils used in consumption of tea in Chinese, Japanese and English society. Raku originated in medieval Japan; it was a conscious reaction to the opulent form conducted in golden rooms, using the finest porcelains, a courtly ritual derived from China. A mystique had been developed around the "way of tea", that determined not merely a formal way of serving and drinking, but more importantly for my work, included the manufacture of vessels by (among others) the Raku family (Cooper, 2000, p79, 331; Pitelka, 2005; de Waal, 1997; Suzuki, 1973); in his book, *Handmade Culture* (2005), Morgan Pitelka argued that the narrative 'owned' by the Raku family had been generated to create a mystique and a degree of market control (Pitelka, 2005, pp39, 125). The writing of *Raku* had led to invitations to collaborate and curate international symposia and exhibitions. These opportunities to present my ceramics in juxtaposition with the work of leading practitioners provided a critical perspective

that prompted me to develop the work away from the display of individual pieces towards Installation practice.

The praxis had enabled me to develop a ceramic language of expression; which involved the narratives of raku and Japanese Zen-inspired teaism, clay geology, British landscape, the domestic and the sculptural vessel (Submissions S2,S3), (*Raku*, pp82,83,100-102)

The work used new ways of re-assigning significance to vessels that moved them to a conceptual role where they could adopt a mainly sculptural or decorative modality, which referenced, but no longer necessarily connected to the craft tradition of utility.

I was invited to collaborate, with Richard Hirsch to form and curate the international symposium, *Raku-Harmony of Earth, Water and Fire (2001)* in Korea, where I created *Deconstructed Tea Bowls, Deconstructed Teaset (S2)*. In order to further investigate the role of the ceramic vessel in the creation of meaning (with Richard Hirsch) I initiated a further symposium in America to examine the embodied narratives of traditional and contemporary objects inspired by containment. For this event there was a group of traditional tea-ware makers from Japan – the Ohi family as well as leading exponents of American style raku - -Paul Soldner, Richard Hirsch, Jean Biagini, Tim Andrews

The discourse engendered by this symposium prompted Hirsch and I to develop a further symposium and exhibition in America, *Raku - Origins, Impact and Contemporary Expression*; this enabled me to create another body of work in 2005, that examined the American raku genre, titled *Vessels about containment (S3)*.

12.2.2 The Vessel.

As Peter Dormer observed, towards the end of the millennium, the pot-form had, in the hands of some makers, developed a role as a container of ideas, and not merely as a container of consumables. (Dormer, 1997, p192)

My early vessels are to be understood within that milieu, where the simple container had been appropriated by ceramic artists in order to conduct “a series of investigations into a whole range of thoroughly domestic objects” (Harrod, 1990, p7).



Fig. 17: Elizabeth Fritsch. *Spout pot with spiral*, 1976

My practice (S2, S3) extended the investigation of referencing the domestic into the world of Japanese tea ceremony raku ceramics, as well as English tea-wares (*Raku*, pp20, 42, 83,100,101). It was the reflection on my work involved in the writing that enabled me to further develop my understanding of the vessel. For me a significant comparison is with Elizabeth Fritsch, who had employed the vessel as an icon for aesthetic interpretation. Fritsch created a range of pots that exploited the interplay of 2 and 3 dimensions on a ceramic surface, itself the surface of a 3D form;

she had also developed a palette of strong colour, the more unusual for being stoneware fired, and matt.

Fritsch's work is impeccably finished with all marks of making and painting removed; in contrast examples of the ceramics that showed evidence of the embedded hand through the indexical marks of making are by the American potters Robert Turner and Peter Voulkos, who used the inherent movement of the potter's wheel to generate surfaces of subtlety and also of energy and power.



Fig. 18: Robert Turner, Glazed and sand-blasted stoneware, 1985



Fig.19: Peter Voulkos *BIG JUPITER*, 1994.

Turner was much pre-occupied with the “factual and also the implied memory” of cultures and traditions (Miro, 2003, p59). In an analogous way my raku ceramics made reference to the dynamic marks found in the Japanese Raku tradition. These impressions of the hand left in the clay are, as Miro observes of Turner’s vessels, “It could also be a sign of a human presence, a direction, or a link to the way marks are made in other cultures.” (Miro, 2003, p83). Philip Rawson has described the way that touch establishes a “direct communication with the maker” (Rawson, 1984, p22). Turner focused on the way that the exterior of the pot was generated by the interior volume and marking; a language that I developed within my raku that referenced the asymmetries and spontaneous mark-making of Japanese Raku teabowls (S2, S3).

Rawson observed that “all the ceramic traditions of the world rest upon a common substratum of meaning which is remarkably consistent” (ibid, p2), which relates to the containment of food or drink. Rawson invites us to see that the fired piece becomes a “transformation image” (ibid, p6), or a “memory trace” (Rawson, 1984, p16), which is another way of describing the embodied narrative of the work in

terms of its materiality. This can seem to the potter himself as like a projection of his own bodily identity, which was exemplified in the submission S7 that I made after undergoing open-heart surgery. In a “two-way revelation”, a “pot thus contains both the reality of materials and process, and the inner realities of man’s sense of identity in relation to his own world of meaning” (ibid, p8). In the subsequent installations the work suggested other avenues for investigation, moving the work beyond the unity of material and form advocated by Rawson. Submission S9 examined the possibilities afforded by the burnt qualities contributed to the ceramic by burying the work in the ashes of the firebox in an anagama. Based on the deduction by Zygmunt Bauman (Baumann, Z., 2010, p8) that the defining characteristic of the Holocaust amongst all other genocides was its planned industrial execution, the work embodied a new critique of the industrial, as an antithesis to the hand-made, through the employment of appropriated waste materials from factories (Submission S10). This was balanced by a move away from the insistent focus on raku firing; while still utilising the methodologies that I had learnt using the raku-firing strategy I also consciously sourced local clays to represent local issues.

12.3) Installation Practice:

12.3.1) The Vessel as an element in installations of Multiples.



Fig. 20: Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, *Travellers 2*, 30 pieces, wood-fired porcelain, 2001.



Fig. 21: Rupert Spira, *121 sake cups*, 2003.



Fig. 22: Edmund de Waal, *A part of speech*, 2010.



Fig. 23: Julian Stair, *Eight Cups on a Circular Ground*, 2013.

12.3.2) Multiples: The Grouping of vessels.

The extension to the meaning of the vessel, moving beyond its initial role as a functional item has occurred many times in ceramic history, and derived initially from its potential use in food consumption and ritual. (Cooper, 2000; Houston, 1991). As makers who produce their work by throwing on the potter's wheel Gwyn Hansen Pigott, Edmund de Waal, Rupert Spira and Julian Stair quoted the production process of repetition throwing, "to work in series...repetitive forming of the same

shape again and again allows the potter to understand the form more intimately” (del Vecchio, 2001, p70). These practitioners were also opening up the possibility of using vessels not solely as pieces for exhibition, but also as elements in installations, comprised of many related forms, like the assemblages made by Hansen Pigott of multiple thrown pieces shown together as a unitary piece; in relating her own work to the paintings of Giorgio Morandi, as a still life, she thereby appropriated the tradition of fine art still-life painting to her practice (del Vecchio, 2001, p72). Rupert Spira forces the association of the vessel as object of contemplation and carrier of meaning by physically engraving lines of poetry on the sides of his bowls. Edmund de Waal explored a subtler relationship between poetic invocation and the vessel by grouping the pieces and titling them to encourage association in the minds of spectators, as well as making continual reference to lines from significant poems (for instance Wallace Stevens) that were influential in the conception of the works, as containers of embodied narrative.

12.3.3) Multiples in installation.



Fig: 24: fixing light - fixing fire, (Installation in Pump Rooms Gallery), 2002.

Another outcome from the research conducted for the book, *Raku – Investigations into Fire* (S1) was a commission to create a touring exhibition *fixing light – fixing fire* (S4), in collaboration with Rod Dorling (photographer) and John Bell (exhibition designer, which employed the narratives of raku to structure the installation.

The exhibition explored the possibilities of using raku, not merely as a technique of making and firing ceramics, but also as a structuring concept that generated the rationales for the physical as well as the conceptual organisation of the installation.



Fig. 25: Virginia Scotchie, *Installation*, 2009.



Fig. 26: Piet Stockmans, *10,000 cups*, porcelain, 2009.

The use of multiples that are distinct, but also replaceable, is a methodology that has been used by many artists and ceramicists: Virginia Scotchie places

different groups of vessels together, based on forms drawn from the domestic, Piet Stockmans groups vessels on the floor, in neutral gallery settings or in significant situations like a church for dramatic effect. The work presented in *fixing light – fixing fire* (S4) moved my thinking from an understanding of technique as a method of manufacture to its engagement as a methodology of semiotic structuring of an exhibition space. It was not an explicatory exhibition in the manner of an anthropological display (Niedderrer, 2006, p6) that utilised captions to explain and provide authentic context; instead it endeavoured to provide a more immersive experience that referenced the making and firing of ceramics, which is an aspect of process normally (by convention) hidden from the audience in an exhibition. In a parallel way to *Raku Harmony*, (S2), *fixing light- fixing fire* (S4) was an extension of the category of “contextual exhibition” in the sense that (Niedderrer, 2006, p7) describes: where although the elements of the exhibition were unique in themselves, they could have in actuality been substituted by other pieces from my production without a loss of meaning in the installation.

The audience for my work has always been an important consideration for me in the planning of the form of displays. Claire Bishop draws our attention to the "activation" of the spectator in an installation, by which she means that more senses than merely the contemplation of the gaze are called into play (Bishop, 2008, p11). S4 created multiple perspectives for the audiences as they moved within the work; the visual spectacle was complemented by the sounds and smells of raku firing that were imported to the gallery space through sound-recording, video and actual burnt sawdust in the integral handling section of the installation.

My intention had been to create a critical dialogue, in the form of an installation, between objects, their embedded modes of manufacture and their means of representation to audiences; the installation was to be read phenomenologically,

as an "opening", a "clearing" where art might happen (Heidegger, 1993, p177). One of the parallel outcomes of this investigation was the emergence of a new language of form and surface in my vessels, which became simpler and more restrained. To begin with I had rationalised this as a closer adherence to the ideas of *wabi-sabi* (Juniper, 2003; Koren, 1994), which is a celebration of the old and patinated – qualities that are embedded in the Zen philosophy that informs raku; as I worked in my studio and reflected on the pieces being produced I realised that they were not merely austere in a Japanese *wabi* sense but that my palette was coming darker and more sombre - the surfaces scarred and burnt, rather than distressed in an aesthetised manner. The secondary-reduction in sawdust had created a patina of more subdued surfaces on the glaze. I reflected on this practice in my second book (S6), (*Firing*, 2007, p167). When I evaluated that work later I perceived that my use of the distressed surfaces of raku, employing the Japanese aesthetic of *wabi-sabi* were also the qualities of some of the found materials that were included in the later installations (S9, S10). These pieces were intended to evoke memories of my personal history through the idea of utilitarian objects, "whose worn patina bears the indexical traces of previous ownership" (Bishop, 2008, p47).

The installation *fixing light-fixing fire* (S4) was not conceived as an installation in the manner of fine art installation practice; it emerged from the concerns of raku itself and took the process and its cultural context as a theme that determined the structure of the piece. Clare Bishop defines installation as an "immersive" and "theatrical" experience, where the spectator is positioned as a direct physical presence within the artistic space (Bishop, 2008, pp17, 20); that employs multiple perspectives to perceive the work (ibid, pp35, 14). In S4 I did not introduce an actual firing into the gallery, rather it alluded to the experience of firing, through the juxtaposition of photographs of such an event; in this it was a different practice to

gallery performance artists such as Claire Twomey who engages makers, or the audience, to create the work in the gallery. The installation *fixing light-fixing fire* (S4) addressed the question of the nature of raku and the contemporary issue of the representation of three-dimensional objects by the two-dimensional photographs that evoked firing. By hanging the photographs they were given a presence in space, subverting a conventional understanding of image as a wall-mounted entity.

When I was offered the 'white-cube' gallery space for *fixing light – fixing fire* (S4), I realized that it would be possible to explore beyond the confines of the unitary object and into an experience that addressed the nature of craft ceramic process and its contexts. My collaborators and I developed a multi-sensory experience – we did not wish merely to engage with the optic, but also the haptic (inviting physical engagement with the vessels), the olfactory (the smells of burnt sawdust associated with raku firing), as well as the auditory (the sounds delivered as background samples in the galleries). Brian O'Doherty reflected on the activation of the "sacramental" space of a gallery removed from the world (O'Doherty, 1999, p14); the installation engaged with some of those conventions of the gallery by suspending large shelves on wires from the ceiling and thus supplanting the need for a plinth.



Fig. 27: *fixing light– fixing fire* (Section of 360° frieze), 2002.

The hanging structure could be viewed from multiple perspectives, each of which brought different combinations of the two-sided photographs into conjunction with the vessels. This created a pre-occupation with the theatricality of the space, a condition of installation also suggested by O'Doherty (ibid, p87). The gallery space was animated by theatre lighting and sound; the sense of immersion was

emphasised by surrounding the spectator with a 360° photograph fixed to the gallery walls – a representation, created by my photographer collaborator Rod Dorling, who had stood at the bottom of Wheal Martin china clay pit, presenting the viewer with the perspective from within a clay-mine. The idea of activating the spectator, so that more senses than the gaze are to be employed in experiencing the art, is fundamental to the nature of craft-objects which in themselves appeal to many other senses, and in particular the haptic.



Fig. 28: *Durch das Feuer Gehen*, 2006.



Fig. 29: *Affairs of the Heart* (detail), 2006.

The installation *Durch das Feuer Gehen* (S5) for Keramikmuseum, Westerwald in Germany and then *Affairs of the Heart* (S7) at a German symposium

coincided with the long illness of my ageing mother. As I helped in her nursing it became increasingly apparent to me that this opportunity to support her own mother and father had been denied to her by the Nazi regime. (Although this realisation had always been with me it was not until I commenced the PhD that I was provided with the framework to recognise my own feelings as part of a wider narrative as a second generation Holocaust survivor). *Durch das Feuer Gehen* was an installation structured according to an aesthetic derived from an archaeological dig, a meditation on the fleeing of my mother's generation as refugees from Nazi oppression from their home in Leipzig. In this way the theoretical understandings that emerged from the research and reflective writing, prepared a clearing for the work to evolve in a direction that had not been planned and designed. In the installation I placed a video projection of the clouds filmed outside of the museum. It operated on a number of levels: initially it was about the actual site – bringing the outside world into the enclosed space. Subsequently, when I heightened the contrast of the video I realised that it could also be read as the smoke emerging from the chimneys. I was conscious that it was my first overt exploration of my narrative of Jewish history in my art, linking ceramics and the Holocaust, and in this way the narrative of archaeology embedded in the display structure was deepened.

Durch das Feuer gehen (S5) employed the context of museums and the institutional relationship of artefacts to their histories, since it was sited in a (German) museum of ceramics. The installation carried associations of the history of clay artefacts, domestic utensils, and my family's narrative with it. In generating this association of the intensely personal and the general I was conscious of the installations of Christian Boltanski (see page 74), and his employment of elements that also obliquely referenced the Holocaust, where he used piles of clothing to evoke the disappearance of people in a factory-like exhibit with a machine sorting the

mounds of random stuff. Susan Pearce draws our attention to the “way in which individual objects accumulate meaning as time passes” (Pearce, 1998, p19). Objects “act as signifiers”, and I used the presence of other pieces from the ceramic tradition in the museum to convey a sense of the shared past – not just of objects but also of individuals.

My reflection on the relevance of the indexical marks of making and firing in my own work led to a curiosity about the significance of these traces found as embedded narratives in the work of other ceramic artists. This led to the research and writing of the book *Firing – Philosophies within Contemporary Ceramic Practice* (S6), published in 2007, which initially addressed technical issues such as the individual effects of a variety of firing strategies, and how they might be achieved. The inquiry developed into an examination of the symbolic languages generated by the marking of ceramics in firing that the featured artists ascribed to their work; this, in turn, created an impetus for me to examine my own language of firing, and how that might be expressed not merely through individual pieces but also in the installation S4 (*Firing*, pp167-171). This then led to a deeper examination of the emerging allusions to Holocaust in my work, that I had detected; these themes were developed in discussion with Professor Catherine Bates, a critical commentator from Warwick University, concerning S5 (*Firing*, pp171-174).

12.3.4) Installations focused on the narrative of the vessel as a signifier for the body.

12.3.4.1) The Vessel / the Body in Installations.

The association of the human body with a ceramic vessel is a common narrative in many cultures. Particularly relevant to this exegesis are the account, in

the Bible, where clay is the material from which Adam is formed by God; in the Jewish folk-tale of saving, the Golem is fashioned from clay by the rabbi Loew, of Prague, fictionalised by Isaac Bashevis-Singer (Bashevis-Singer, 1982, p2).



Fig. 30: Piet Stockmans, *Urnen*, Installation in Museum-church Deventer (NL), 1999.



Fig. 31: Julian Stair, *Quietus*, (detail), 2013.

This has also been a theme in contemporary ceramic expression, where Julian Stair has used his installations of vessels, for instance *Quietus* (2013), to explore the issues of loss and death, by appropriating the form of the upright burial urn, and installing a wall of urns. My own use of the icon of the urn derives from those found at Buchenwald; the collection of objects at Buchenwald included an installation of urns that had been sold back to Jewish families and ostensibly contained the ashes of their relatives who had been killed by the Nazis.



Fig. 32: *Metal Urns for human ashes*, Buchenwald, 2011



Fig. 33: *Grenzerfahrung*, (detail), 2011



Fig. 34: *Grenzerfahrung*, (detail), 2011

I referenced the Neolithic pots found in European grave sites, often broken on discovery and spilling out their contents of bones and jewellery. In his installation *Urnen* in 1998, Piet Stockmans utilized ceramic vessels to stand for the absent congregation in a church; de Waal notes how Stockmans emphasised the association of vessel and body (de Waal, 2003, p188). This was a methodology of display, a language that I adopted in Submissions S7, S8, S9, S10.

My idea of utilising individuated pieces was to contravene the trope of using multiples of identical objects in an installation, as seen in the work of Stockmans and, to an extent, de Waal; my representation of the difference embodied by the individual identity of the pieces led me to the phenomenological conception of the elements standing for real people in my ancestral life in the later installations (S5, S7, S8, S9, S10). The elements in S5 and S7 were to be perceived as both similar to each other, yet individuated, in the same way as the photographic record shows roll-calls at the concentration camp – the people could be anyone; they could also have been my grandparents.

12.3.4.2) Installations focused on Narratives of the Holocaust.



Fig. 35: *Affairs of the Heart (S7 detail)*, 2006

Affairs of the Heart (S7), created at the symposium *Wofur brennen Wir* was my last piece of work conceived exclusively for raku firing. It consciously utilised the burnt and blackened surfaces I had evolved in my raku to explicitly express the fate of bodies, and people, in the Holocaust; the presentation of some of the vessels not merely on their sides but unable to stand on hard surfaces, as I had redesigned the vessels to come to a point, was to be read as a metaphor for the destabilised society in which my family antecedents and many others had found themselves. (The representation involved contrasting the softness of low-fired raku clay with hard polished porcelain objects on a raku-fired pillow form, lustred with terra-sigillata).



Fig. 36: *The warriors of 5-12* (S8 detail), 2008.

The title: *Warriors of 5-12* (S8) made reference to the date of the earthquake that had occurred earlier that year in Szechuan; (it was also the subject of the later work *So Sorry* by Ai Wei Wei (2009)). It was created at a factory studio in central China, where I had been invited to organise a group of British clay artists to create a symposium working in a brick factory in China. The *Warriors of 5-12* (S8), was informed by the site – it referenced the *Terracotta Army* located nearby in Xian; I investigated the deployment of extruded tubes of clay, appropriated from the factory production line, as elements for expressive self-representation. I went to the symposium while I was still in recovery from open-heart surgery; the scars were still very evident at the time. I transformed the tubes through direct marking on the surface and stretching the cuts, to stand initially for the inscriptions on my newly scarred torso. I employed a concept derived from the layout of the *Terracotta Army* as a structuring device for the installation to reference individual humanity. This identity evoked by the vessel-forms applied initially to myself, the single unitary

scarred body. When I grouped the elements together it was reminiscent of the photographs of the roll-call of the inmates of the concentration camps.



Fig. 37: *The Terracotta Army*, mausoleum of Emperor Qin Shi Huang, Xian, China.



Fig. 38: *New arrivals at roll-call in Buchenwald, 1943.*

The *Warriors of 5-12* (S8) was informed by the use of multiples in contemporary art and ceramics— but where Antony Gormley's *Field* (2003) was composed of figures made by collaborators, my vessels were individuated by me from the industrially produced elements by modifying the clay extrusions myself; the

elements I produced were concerned with identity in addition to multiplicity – a re-iteration of aspects of the self. The idea of factory production was also of significance in my portrayal of the work; Zigmund Bauman (2010) identified the industrialization of murder as the chief distinguishing feature of that genocide. For the base of the installation I appropriated the industrially inspired Minimalist language developed by Carl Andre in pieces such as *Equivalent VIII* (1968) and *144 Lead Square* (1969); I took unwanted, over-fired kiln slabs from the factory site, which acted as a plinth under the vessel-forms. Instead of the cool, non-expressive language of Andre, this work was intended to convey the oppressive nature of mechanical production in contrast to the human marking of clay vessels by the hand. As Anthony Gormley has said of his piece, *Field*, the clay is “sensitised by touch” (Gormley, 2015).

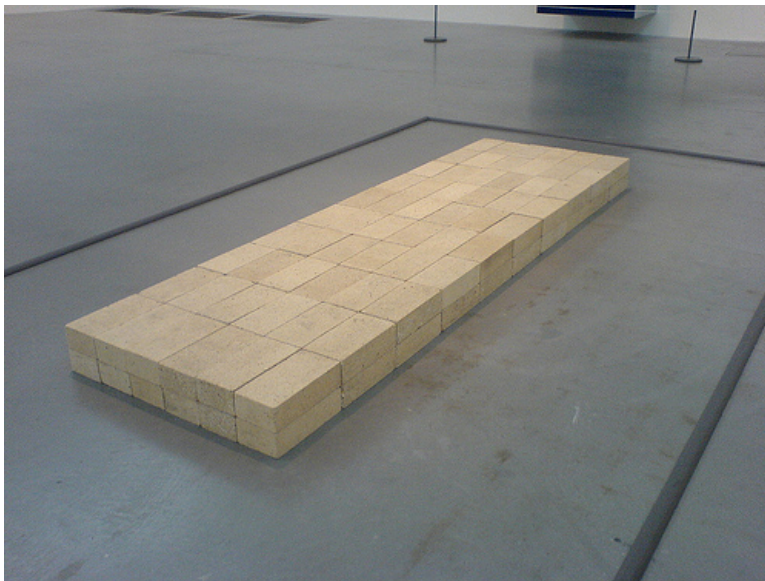


Fig. 39: Carl Andre, *Equivalent VIII*, 1966.



Fig. 40: Anthony Gormley, *Field for China*, 2003.

12.5.1) Installations focused on Narratives of the Holocaust.



Fig. 41: *A Body of Contention* (S9 detail), 2010, (detail of charred surface of element buried in the firepit)



Fig. 42: *A Body of Contention (S9)*, 2010 (detail of underside of the anagama fired element showing the passage of flame through the stack).

The interest in exposing clay objects to extreme heat and the interpretations that might derive from this (in particular the contiguity of firing in a kiln and burning in the crematoria) led to an invitation to an anagama firing conference in Estonia in 2010, where experimentation utilising extreme firing qualities was possible. *A Body of Contention (S9)* represented my grandmother who had perished in the Holocaust, but managed to save all her children by getting them onto the *kindertransports*. This piece examined the ways in which heat-marking of the clay might be used to create a sculptural object, incorporating found elements. The ceramic parts were positioned on an appropriated old wooden pallet, to suggest the commodification of life and death under the Nazis and to symbolise the transport of bodies by train – in one case to the camps, or the *kindertransport* to England and freedom. To make the vessel elements I used throwing on the potter's wheel as a metaphoric as well as a making practice since it embodied the association of the domestic/the normal. The pieces were flattened while still malleable – a symbolic as well as a physical action, resulting

in a form that was cracked and split under the pressure. They were placed directly in the flame path, where they received maximum heat-work and therefore coloration, (which was accentuated by blowing soft-wood dust into the kiln at 1275° C.)



Fig. 43: Julian Stair, *Corpus*, 2012.



Fig. 44: Edmund de Waal, *Tenebrae II*, 2004.

Thus *A Body of Contention* (S9) exploited the allegorical qualities of the vessel to draw a parallel between the body of a pot and the body of a human, as an act of remembrance. In this the work shares contemporary concerns with British ceramic artists Edmund de Waal and Julian Stair. Stair in particular has employed the vessel to great effect in expressing grief for the death of his son, and an uncle – consciously utilising the forms of the funerary urn and grave in his installation *Quietus* (2012). De Waal's piece *Tenebrae II* creates a cooler ambience for his emotions and replaces the earth colour of terracotta used mainly by Stair with the austere refinement of porcelain; in the work of both artists one can perceive an aspiration to a contemplative attitude in the presentation of their works as well as in their titling. My work uses a different palette, drawn from the more extreme firing practices of raku and anagama, where the clay is subjected to extremes of fire (*Firing*, pp73-95); it

employs a different mode of installation that does not aspire to the refined finishes and modes of display of these artists.



Fig. 45: *Grenzerfahrung*, (S10), 2011



Fig. 46: *Bunks in Buchenwald*, 1945



Fig. 47: *Grenzerfahrung* (S10), 2012



Fig. 48: Joseph Beuys, *Wirtschaftswerte* (Economic Values), 1980

The installation *Grenzerfahrung* (S10) was created at the *Panta Rhei* symposium in Germany. It referenced the form of the installation *Wirtschaftswerte* (*Economic Values*) by Josef Beuys, which had employed a set of iron shelves to structure the work. He had stocked the shelves with basic food stuffs and tools from the former GDR and had employed his own personal vocabulary of materiality – plaster block with pencil and fat; he had also included paintings appropriated from the collection of the host museum in which it was shown. *Grenzerfahrung* was also created in the former East Germany; it used clay forms and appropriated the poem *Todesfugue*, by Paul Celan (Celan, 1980) which had been written in response to the

Death Camps; (this poem was also significantly used by Anselm Kiefer in his oeuvre, also to evoke the Holocaust). This incorporation of poetry with vessels shares a concern with the ceramic installation work *Atemwende* (2013), by de Waal and more especially Rupert Spira, who has directly incised lines of poetry on his vessels in installations (*Poem Bowl*, 2007; and *Installation at Collect* 2013).

Touring the work also made it possible to experiment with new configurations of the shelves and their contents, that comprised the elements of the installation, in relationship to different spaces. In his installation, *Wirtschaftswerte* (1980), Beuys was referencing the Marxist ideology used by the communist dictatorship in the GDR by incorporating paintings from the period of Marx's life, appropriated from the gallery in which it was shown. In *Grenzerfahrung* (S10) I used the shelves not to reference a shop and the lack of luxury in the GDR, but to suggest the stacked bunks of the huts in the concentration camps. The line of shelves also represented the division imposed on Germany after the war and the new border (*Grenze*) – built to prevent the inhabitants from leaving after the formation of the GDR. The paintings in *Wirtschaftswerte* were to suggest an aspect of bourgeois luxury; I used porcelain, glazes and salt-glaze firing to point up a contrast between the inner and outer worlds of the prisoners in the camps. When I experienced *Wirtschaftswerte* I was conscious that, without the war, that life in the GDR could have been my own; for Beuys, the artefacts from the GDR "represented a simplicity and authenticity that reminded him of his childhood" (Beuys, 2011), opposed to the commodification of life in the West.

Grenzerfahrung was also an opportunity to experiment deeper with the concept of collaborative working, that had commenced with working with artistic equals in *fixing light – fixing fire* (S4). Gormley's *Field* (2003), (see page 65), Beuys's notion of *Soziale Plastik* (Social Sculpture), *The Dinner Party* (1974-79) revealed the power of working with the public. With the visitors to the studio, and to the installation

exhibition sites, I initiated the manufacture of a series of hand-made elements to occupy the shelves that referenced one of the most resonant images of the Holocaust – the piles of rings found by the American troops who had liberated Buchenwald. The simple clay rings alluded to the subversion of values of those unique objects that symbolised a human social relationship, and its debasement by the Nazis as only worth-value.

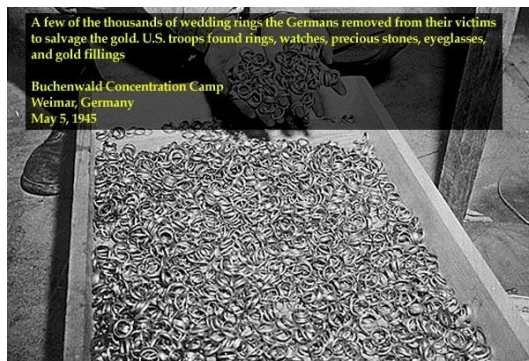


Fig. 49: Gold Rings collected from victims, 1945



Fig. 50: *Grenzerfahrung* (S10 detail, Cracked open vessel, rings, terracotta clay, terra sigillata slip), 2011



Fig. 51: raw clay rings left at Buchenwald, porcelain, local clays, 2011



Fig. 52: raw clay rings left at Buchenwald (detail), 2011

Nonetheless, in *Grenzerfahrung* the theme of the Holocaust was not overtly stated; I was conscious of the precedent set by Judy Chicago in her powerful work *The Holocaust Project* (1992). As in my own practice, her piece was motivated by a growing sense of her Jewish identity underpinned by a research trip to all of the major sites of the factories of death – an experience that was so immersive that it

destabilised her psychological well-being. In Chicago's account of the way that the subject of the Holocaust emerged into her work (Chicago, 1993, pp3-6), it was apparent that while much of her previous output had focussed on feminist issues she felt driven to deal with this further aspect of her identity that had lain dormant in her psyche. She maintained many of her previous concerns, especially the language that she had evolved to research the place of women in culture. She used the languages and materialities of craft, but in this instance she did not employ ceramics, as she had done in her landmark installation *The Dinner Party*. In *Grenzerfahrung* the language that had been developed in firing raku was extended to articulate my personal relationship to the Holocaust. Our outcomes were significantly different: Chicago developed a strongly figurative style and developed work in the craft disciplines of tapestry and stained glass to communicate her message. Her work was expertly executed by craftspeople; *Grenzerfahrung* developed my evolving installation practice, based on ceramics, appropriated materials and poetry. *Grenzerfahrung* employed modes of display that implied the random disposition of bodies, while it exercised the equivalence of vessels and bodies rather than the literal evocation seen in Chicago's work. *Grenzerfahrung* utilised redundant, appropriated materials from industrial production to emphasise the critical distinction of the Holocaust as a factory of killing: "[Auschwitz] was a mundane extension of the modern factory system. Rather than producing goods the raw material was human beings and the end-product was death." (Feingold, quoted in Bauman, 2010, p8)

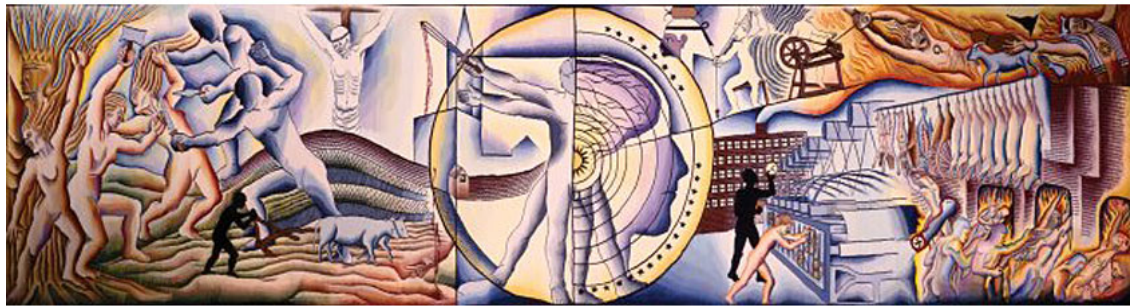


Fig. 53: Judy Chicago, *The Fall from the Holocaust Project*, 1993.

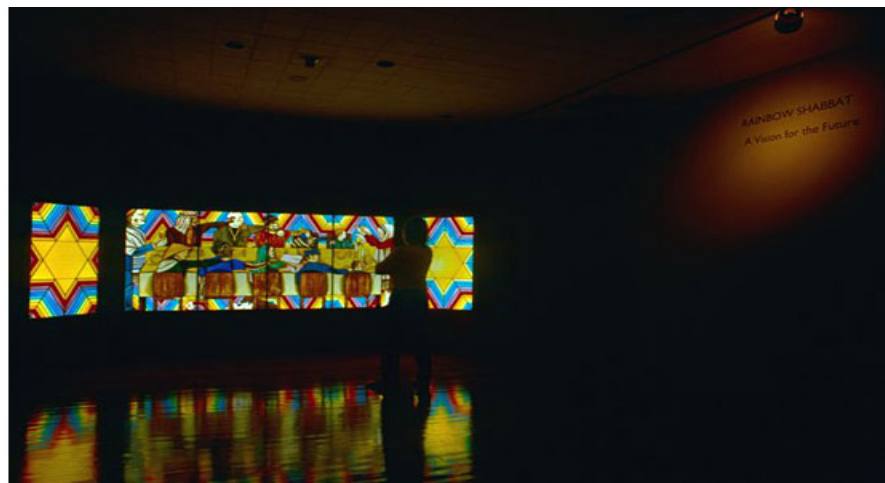


Fig. 54: *Rainbow Shabbat*, from the *Holocaust Project*, 1993.

12.3.5) A critique of the language of materiality and appropriated materials in installation.

The theme of Materiality was a significant issue in *Grenzerfahrung*. Clay as a signifier has highly evocative material connotations; clay is earth – it is a universal basic material, from which our cities are built, our tableware is made and it has been used in many creation myths as the fundamental material used by the god of creation. Not solely was the clay used to make the ceramic elements of the installation sourced from German clay suppliers, but I also used locally dug terracottas. The clay rings taken to the concentration camp site at Buchenwald were

made from local clay and allowed to return to the earth in the rain. This generated a personal resonance mediated by the cyclical life of clay: On my first visit to the Leipzig, I had visited the grave of my mother's elder sister who, like my mother, was born in the city, but she had died in childhood; this marked grave-site in the earth represented a significant material connection to the city of my mother's birth; the return of the formed clay rings to the earth was a letting-go.

The industrial nature of the Holocaust was alluded to by the appropriation of the waste shelving-units from the factory. Boltanski in his piece *Personnes* (2010) used piles of old clothing to metaphorically invoke humanity - not just those fated to be killed in the 'ethnic cleansing' of the C20th, but ultimately all of us, as Laura Cummings observes in her article for the Guardian, clothing can stand for people. (Cummings, L.)



Fig. 55: Christian Boltanski, *Personnes*, 2010.



Fig. 56: *Grenzerfahrung*, (S10 detail), 2011



Fig. 57: *Grenzerfahrung*, (S10 detail), 2011, *dein Aschenes Haar, Shulamith*. Steel Swarf from the ELIÖG factory site

Grenzerfahrung (S10) further extended the vocabulary of form and surface to express my ideas concerning the Holocaust. Not only did I use the vessel form, but

also made elements for the installation that referenced the piles of human traces and artefacts that were the result of Nazi extermination policies – the hoards of spectacles, shoes, clothes, suitcases, gold fillings; all were piled up, sorted for re-use, as well as in the ultimate ironic, cruel gesture, sold to pay for the cost of the killing, as attested to in Claude Lanzmann's 1985 film *Shoah* – thus fixing the idea of the commodification of murder. I chose to work with a limited palette of shapes to use as multiples on the shelves: children's toys, rings and urns. Found materials from the factory site provided further embodied narratives – a broken saw-blade alluded to the barbed wire fences of the camps, an old truck suggested the wagons used to move the bodies from gas chamber to crematorium. Clay heart-forms fashioned just in my hands, piles of scrap clay stood for the remnants of humanity and humans in that place.



Fig. 58: *Pile of ash in Buchenwald, 1945.*



Fig. 59: *Grenzerfahrung* (S10 detail, earthenware turnings), 2011.

12.3.6) Installation Art as an embodied phenomenological experience.

For Claire Bishop, "installation art presupposes an embodied viewer...the literal presence of the viewer" (Bishop, 2008, p6); my installation *Grenzerfahrung* (S10), dealt with its contrary, absence, dwelling on the concept of the Holocaust or the *Shoah*, which means the great destruction – it is the non-presencing of beings. Levinas' insistence on the face of the other (Levinas, 1998, p8) as the foundation of a

moral code, was a reflective insight that inspired me to utilise the embodiment symbolised in the hand-made vessel to stand for those murdered civilians. The embedded hand in crafted objects references an authentic relationship of maker to object, insofar as it shows that I was present in the making, and in the perception of the objects through handling and vision, establishes a human link. I wished to use that idea of the presence of the maker, through the use of hand-made vessels in the installation, to re-instate the humanity of individuals whose lives had been curtailed by the Nazis.

12.3.7) The significance of the audience in installation.

One of the benefits of creating sited work is the possibility of discussion and testing an idea on the eventual audience for the completed piece. *Grenzerfahrung (S10)* could be read differently in the different exhibition sites of the installation, and allowed me to adapt it to local conditions. From discussion with visitors to the installations, while I was constructing and remaking it, it was apparent that some of this complex iconography that I intended might not necessarily be communicated simply through the physicality of the ceramic pieces and the associated found elements. There was obviously no pre-existing dictionary for the ceramic language that could be easily translated. In the three further installations of *Grenzerfahrung (S10)* in galleries away from the studio at the factory there were elements that had to be explained; I used poems by Paul Celan as metonymic aids - that is mental prompts - to indicate the idea of Holocaust; a symbolic shorthand that Claire Bishop sees as central to the effectiveness of an installation (Bishop, 2011, p42). I also employed a written statement that explained my own relationship to German history. In this way I was able to test different ways of installing the piece so that it evoked

different experiences (for me), to better ensure that they were communicated to the audiences, through discussion with local visitors.

Since Römhild (the site of its inception) was only 7 kilometres from the former border area between East and West, the local spectators were very open to the symbolic analogy of a division of the (gallery) space by a long line of shelves which was to stand as an idea of the physical barrier separating them from neighbours and family only an hour's walk away over the border. By contrast, in the former West Germany, that iconography was not so readily accessed; thus in Koblenz I installed the structure towards the edge of the space – more analogous to how the border had existed in their lives.

13) Conclusion

Through the engagement with Practice as Research (of my evolving artistic practice developing in tandem with the interrogative practice involved in my writing) a new language of raku expression developed that was then employed to generate installations. Through that expanded practice, the lightly obscured traces of the past lives of my mother's family, threaded through the history of the C20th emerged as the central subject of the work. Through making, layers of the palimpsest of my familial history were uncovered; these were traces that were partially erased through forgetting but also unconscious suppression by my mother's generation. This praxis has led me to address the narrative of my grandparents from the point of view of a second generation Holocaust survivor. By "survivor", I relate to the following meaning offered by Alix Kirsta: "In recent years, large numbers of middle-aged men and women have been trying to make sense of their backgrounds which have sometimes

been obscured especially where their parents have been unable to talk about their experiences” (Kirsta, 2014).

The apparent “silence” of many of the victims of the Holocaust, including my mother, and indeed my grandparents, who were prematurely silenced, provided a context within which to articulate concerns about the unexpressed elements of experience. When Roland Barthes wrote (in *Camera Lucida*) of examining the photograph of his mother, he was not resurrecting her but he manipulated the pain (in his case caused by the absence of a known loved one) to express himself in the language of words. In a parallel way, this praxis has led to an investigation the pain of the disappearance of my unknown grandparents by utilising the language of making and firing into a new expressive way of showing my ideas through installation. This language, which had originated in the making and reflecting on raku, came to involve an extended vocabulary that included new clay bodies and modes of firing, in addition to new expression discovered through the utilisation of found objects in the work.

14) Contribution to knowledge

This exegesis evidences an original praxis – an integration of making and firing practices and theoretical reflection – understood through the lens of Practice as Research.

The contribution comprises:

14.1) New understandings of contemporary international practice within the Japanese and American traditions of raku, and as well as within the contexts of contemporary responses to the Arts and Crafts Movement and the culture of the academy, through theoretical investigation. The critique extended raku from a Way of

making and firing to include sculptural applications of firing and ultimately as a way of thinking. This was published as the book, *Raku* (S1).

14.2) The positioning of personal practice within the international community of makers through the writing of *Raku* (S1). (The research for this text provided the contacts for curating the future symposia and exhibitions in which submissions S2 and S3 were shown).

14.3) New interpretations of the vessel-tradition developed through the symposia (these were subsequently exhibited in the international exhibitions S2 and S3).

14.4) Technical advances in the use of lustre glazes and terra-sigillata slip decorated surfaces that had been critically examined in *Raku* (S1) (evidenced in S2 and S3).

14.5) The examination of a Way of making through exhibition/installation, as a physical response to the theoretical discoveries of the narratives underpinning raku, which had been discovered in writing *S1*, through a collaborative integration of raku ceramics, photographs and methods of display (S4).

14.6) The evolution of a new expressive language of raku ceramics that involved the investigation of the potential of the developments in form and surface-finish, employed in new modes of installation practice, which represented new ways of reading the autonomous ceramic vessel. This language was expressed through a mode of exhibiting that examined my own narratives, that was sensitive to site and underpinned by a phenomenological understanding of hapticity, expressive of embodied making. (The application of this language was interrogated through new installation practice in S4 and S5.)

14.7) The critical positioning of raku as an evolved expressive language within the contemporary arena of firing. This involved a theoretical interrogation of the

meanings embodied by fired surface on individual pieces and those placed within installations. These reflections into the range of possible interpretation afforded by fired surface to express personal narratives became the book *Firing* (S6).

14.8) The application of the language of expression, which had been originated in raku, to be applied to investigate issues of individual embodiment through new formal and firing experiments presented in installation (investigated in installations S7 and S8).

14.9) The employment of the ceramic language evolved through raku to examine personal narratives and to uncover silenced discourses concerning the Holocaust. This also involved an extended vocabulary of material expression through appropriation to reference the industrialised killing of those victims. (This conclusion was resolved in S9, S10).

15) Future action/ limitations of research

The understandings reached through the writing of this exegesis are the basis for new developments in the studio. This writing has better enabled the articulation of a ceramic language: an understanding has evolved of the power of that language to communicate, and also of its limitations. I recognise that there are aspects of a ceramic language that are hermetic – accessible only to those who have had exposure through collecting or education in ceramics, but I would argue that this is also the case in many art forms, for instance in music, where one can have differing levels of appreciation from the untutored audience or the cognoscenti; one is not necessarily superior to the other. Nonetheless, one of the discoveries from talking to audiences of *Grenzerfahrung* was that there was a sense of communication of maker to audience through the direct intuition of hand-made clay objects and the effect of flame directly on the clay surface. This shows how a communication is established

between maker and audience concerning loss and memory, and this will also be applied in new areas of work in the future.

I am currently working with a local group called Justice for Palestine to create an artwork that will address this related, urgent contemporary issue of the displaced and dispossessed.

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